

Knowing of your interest in forest management issues, I wanted to inform you of yesterday's [decision](#)

by Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack that grants the Department of Agriculture authority to halt the construction of road-building on national forests for one year while the Administration determines how to resolve the longstanding issues with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

I have long been concerned with the roadless rule that was originally enacted by President Bill Clinton. This roadless rule created millions of acres of de facto wilderness on our national forest lands. Unfortunately, this inhibits our ability to restore the health of struggling national forests and reduce the threat of large-scale wildfires. Our forest managers need the option of building roads as an integral tool for allowing them to access and thin these overgrown stands, restoring them to a healthy and fire-resilient condition.

Additionally, without adequate roads, it is more difficult and more dangerous for fire fighters to battle out-of-control fires. According to fire personnel, the best and most effective way to fight fires is through a direct ground attack. Without a proper road infrastructure our fire crews cannot easily gain ground access to fires. Officials are then left with secondary options of combined air attacks that are increasingly more expensive, less effective, and more dangerous for firefighters who have to parachute into wild country. Furthermore, the roadless rule limits public access for a variety of recreational activities. Roadless areas restrict access to only those who have the ability to walk or hike long distances into the forest, excluding thousands who could enjoy their public lands with the assistance of motorized vehicles.

I believe we must take reasonable steps to ensure that we conserve our natural resources for the benefit of future generations of Americans. However, I believe conservation should come from responsible stewardship and management, not through increased federal regulations. I also strongly believe that our public resources should be carefully administered in a way that provides our citizens with full access and use of their public lands, and am concerned that additional federal designations or land set-asides serve only to lock up our federal lands from the very public that owns them.